

XI.—*Observations on the Striated Field-Wren* (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*). By H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., M.R.A.O.U., Fellow of the Royal Society of Tasmania.

THE Field-Wren of Tasmania is plentiful on the swampy tussocky plains near the sea-beach of the north-west coast of the Island where I reside, and its sweet little strain is one of the most familiar sounds of winter and spring; it is, indeed, one of our most persistent songsters, and there are very few months of the year when it may not be heard. Formerly considered to be identical with the Victorian form of the same species, it has now been separated. In Mathews' 'Hand-List of the Birds of Australasia,' issued as a supplement to 'The Emu,' 1908, our species retains the title "*fuliginosus*," while that of Victoria (Australia) is distinguished as "*albivox*." As to vernacular names, our bird has been sometimes called the Rush-Warbler, from its habit of uttering its ditty from the top of a "Button-Rush" or other swamp-growth, but "Striated Field-Wren" is now the recognised term. The boys of North Tasmania have bestowed upon it the not inapt epithet of "Mud-Lark," expressive of its fondness for frequenting wet, swampy land, and its vocal ability.

The upper plumage is of a pleasing olive-brown, distinctly streaked with black, while the under side is yellowish, streaked in the same way; there is a whitish line over the eye. The tail is usually carried erect, but I have noticed that this bird will often sing with the rectrices depressed until they are in a line with the body; on being approached, however, the tail will be elevated and the body moved from side to side in an excited manner, the songster often keeping its position and continuing the strain till the intruder is within two or three yards, when it will drop into the herbage at the foot of its perch and disappear. The song is usually uttered from the summit of a piece of scrub, such as young swamp tea-tree (*Melaleuca*), or of a large tussock like the "button-rush" (*Gymnoschoenus*), which grows on swampy flats; often the top of a post in a rail-fence forms the perch. The song

is short but sweet, the phrase varying in individuals but appearing constant in each: thus, if at a certain spot we hear a song which strikes us as differing from the normal, on visiting the spot again we can usually hear the same song repeated. In the ordinary ditty certain notes ring out much louder than the rest, and these give a ventriloquial effect, sounding sometimes as if they were several yards distant from where the songster is perched. In the spring month of October, a Field-Wren was heard singing from the summit of a piece of scrub near the beach with a phrase like " *Wect-ee-tee-tee-twa*" continually repeated, and directly the bar was concluded there would generally be two notes, "*twee-twee*," before it was recommenced. It was difficult to determine whether these two almost isolated notes were uttered by the singer or by its mate concealed near by, as is the case with the Coachwhip-bird (*Psophodes crepitans*) of the East Australian scrubs.

The *Calamanthus* is one of our earliest breeders, beginning probably during the cold frosty month of July; nesting is certainly in full swing during August, usually one of our roughest and wettest months. The nest is a domed structure with a side-entrance, quite thick and bulky from the amount of material which is used for its construction. Books which I have consulted give the nesting-site as at the foot of a bush or tussock; such, however, has not been my own experience, for while searching under bushes or tussocks I was invariably unsuccessful. All the nests found on this north-west coast of Tasmania have been placed well *within* a large sagg or tussock; and it is a curious fact that this species almost invariably places the entrance of its abode on the south-east side of the plant in which it is situated, or away from the prevailing north-west winds which bring a great deal of heavy rain. The bird slips in and out of the side-entrance through the drooping blades of the tussock. About two years ago I found quite a number of these domiciles by searching through the hundreds of large clumps or tussocks which abound on the swampy flats adjacent to the sea-beach. The nest is usually placed a foot or two from

the ground in the heart of the tussock, with the entrance to one side among the drooping blades, by which it is completely concealed; the structure is generally placed on a base of moss and vegetable débris, such as fragments of dry tussock blades. A typical structure was discovered in a large clump of the long-bladed "sagg," *Nerotes longifolia*: it was placed well within the clump and about twelve inches from the ground, having the entrance to the south-east among the drooping blades. The material of the exterior was coarse grass-stems and bits of various other dry vegetation; the bulk of the nest was of finer grass, of which also the lining was composed, with the addition of some feathers. The young had left the nest some days previous to its discovery on October 20th; one infertile egg, of the usual reddish tint, remained, which measured approximately $\cdot87 \times \cdot68$ inch. During the same spring another nest of a somewhat different type was found in a *Lepidosperma* tussock growing among young swamp tea-trees (*Melaleuca*): it was packed some way down in the heart of the tussock, and would doubtless have rested on the ground within had not the Field-Wrens, before commencing the actual structure, collected a quantity of moss and vegetable débris as a base of operations. The nest was composed of dry grass, with a little moss about the entrance, which, contrary to the usual custom, faced the north-west; as the tussock was in this instance protected by small scrub, however, the position of the aperture was not of so much importance. The structure differed from the usual type in not being nearly so massive, and somewhat resembled a deep cup tilted on one side, so that, when looking straight down into the tussock, I gazed into the opening and could just discern the eggs when the sitting bird was absent. Neither interior nor exterior of the nest could be seen, the latter being very cunningly concealed under the tussock-blades and long grass which grew up with them, as well as by the pointed-leaved trailing plant *Stellaria pungens*. This nest would have remained unseen had not the sitting bird flown out almost from under my feet. On examination there proved to be three partially-

incubated eggs of a reddish tint, with a large patch of purplish black all over the apex, then lighter dusky spots, and more of these scattered about the remainder of the shell. One of the clutch was much lighter than the other two—almost whitish. Two of them had practically the same measurements, approximately $.87 \times .63$ inch; the third egg was accidentally fractured.

The eggs are usually three in number, of a reddish-brown tint, with a zone of purplish brown about the apex, and some scattered indistinct spots besides.

The lower lip of the nest-entrance protruded beyond the upper.

While its abode was under examination the male bird sang furiously from the top of a piece of scrub, evidently with the wish to distract my attention.

In some cases an old nest already in the heart of a tussock appears to form a base for the new one, so as to raise the latter well off the marshy surface of the plain; often the top of the entrance appears to overhang and form eaves to cast off rain or hail and keep the opening dry and snug. The walls of the structure are usually thick and closely woven, as indeed they need to be, for incubation is often carried on during the cold wet months of early spring.

Just before the middle of September I saw two young Field-Wrens making their way through a scrub of small tea-tree in charge of their parents, the example of which they followed most worthily in slipping out of sight in the quickest possible time. At the end of the same month I found three young which had lately left the nest and were concealed in some low scrub. The old birds laboured hard to draw me away from the spot, but at length I was successful in flushing the young, which lay very closely in cover. When disturbed, two of them flew a few yards before dropping into another scrub-patch, while the third remained concealed until almost trodden upon, when it made off in a different direction. They appeared to be of a generally darker hue than the parents, their plumage being